

# Living Longer, Feeling Better



BY PAT GLEICH

**D**id you know that healthy lifestyles are more influential than genetic factors in helping us live longer and feel better? People who are physically active, eat a healthy diet, do not use tobacco and practice other healthy behaviors reduce their risk for chronic diseases and have half the rate of disability of those who do not. Here are some painless ways to reduce your health risks.

## **Get mild to moderate exercise for at least 20 minutes a day, four days a week.**

Staying physically active on a regular, permanent basis can help prevent or delay certain diseases (like some types of cancer, heart disease or diabetes) and disabilities. Make physical activity a part of your everyday life. Do things you enjoy—walk with a friend or spouse, or do physical tasks around the house and in the yard. Climb the stairs rather than take the elevator.

## **Eat low-fat, high-fiber foods.**

Eat small, balanced, nutritious meals every day; work to reduce or eliminate anti-nutrients such as refined sugar, fried foods, caffeine, and saturated or hydrogenated fats. Eat a variety of fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, whole grains and legumes. Get most of your calories from complex carbohydrates like fruits, vegetables, whole grain cereals, breads and pastas. Have three servings of low-fat milk, yogurt or cheese a day. Calcium and vitamin D help keep our bones strong as we age.



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## **Drink plenty of fluids.**

Learn to drink water even when you are not thirsty—at least two quarts of filtered water each day. Water helps filter out the toxic substances we breathe, the unhealthy additives in our food and generally assists all body systems in working more efficiently.

## **Get regular medical and dental checkups.**

Screening to detect chronic diseases early in their course, when they are most treatable, can save many lives. Denial, ignoring symptoms, lumps, and missing early diagnosis can contribute to conditions that are more difficult—and costly—to treat. Be certain you receive your annual immunizations. More than 40,000 people age 65 or older die each year of influenza and its complications, and pneumonia. Immunizations reduce risk, complications, hospitalization or death from these diseases.

## **Keep a positive attitude.**

While it might be difficult to follow the directions of the song

“Don’t Worry, Be Happy,” people who view their glasses as half full generally have fewer health problems, recover more quickly from illness and, frankly, are more fun to be around than those who view the glasses as half empty. Use creative interpretation, prayer, music, meditation, yoga, massage therapy, exercise and creative outlets such as writing, dance, painting and singing to reduce stress.

## **Socialize with friends and family.**

Take time to visit with the people who are important to you. Get active in your church. Organize a dinner and video discussion group for a circle of friends. This has the dual benefit of serving as a regularly scheduled social activity to look forward to—as well as a forum for stimulating thought-provoking memory enhancing discussions.

## **Drive safely and wear a seat belt.**

Be certain you are alert before you get behind the wheel of your vehicle and if you have trouble seeing in low light, drive only during the daytime. If you know your response time is slow, avoid highways with high speed limits, stay out of rush hour traffic and busy interstates, and do not drive on rainy or snowy days.

## **Practice injury prevention.**

Falls are the most common cause of injuries to older adults. More than one-third of adults age 65 or older fall each year, and

of those who fall, 20–30 percent sustain moderate to severe injuries that decrease mobility and independence. Removing tripping hazards in the home and installing grab bars and stair rails are simple measures that can greatly reduce older adults' risk for falls and fractures. Avoid wet or icy sidewalks and steps.

### **Groom your spiritual self.**

Expressions of spirituality through religious practice or compassion, service to others or passing on wisdom to succeeding generations often can bring deep personal satisfaction, comfort, and peace. Doing meaningful volunteer work through the church is a wonderful way to focus on spiritual aspects.

### **Limit your alcoholic beverages to no more than one or two a day.**

Alcohol, while potentially having cardiovascular benefit if consumed in moderation, can interfere with medications, contribute to accidents and falls, and increase response and reaction time for drivers.

### **Get enough sleep.**

Although many people indicate they require less sleep as they age, our bodies do not lose the need for rest and the restoration that comes from rest.

### **Wear sunscreen and sunglasses when you are outside.**

While we all need a small amount of vitamin D from the sun to help our bodies use other minerals and vitamins, too much exposure can be problematic.

### **Enjoy a healthy love life, whatever your age.**

Our need for both physical intimacy and companionship continues to be critically important throughout our lives. Intimate relationships provide important enjoyment and opportunities for spontaneity, an atmosphere of trust, respect, understanding, mutual assistance and confidentiality.

### **Learn something new every day.**

Read; study; visit galleries, exhibits, libraries and museums; investigate community education or older scholars programs and other opportunities to continue life-long learning. Learning can include skills—cooking or sports—any activity that requires you to stretch!

### **Give up smoking.**

Smoking related illness remains the number one cause of death in the United States.

### **Practice safe sex.**

While many people still view HIV and AIDS as a young person's disease, older people are also affected. Nearly 23 percent of the total cases of HIV nationwide are reported in persons over the age of 50. Unfortunately, older adults have not traditionally been targeted to receive even the most basic HIV/AIDS education and prevention information. As a result, HIV infection rates among adults over 50 continues to grow and diagnosis is often missed.

### **Maintain your commitment to practicing better nutrition when you eat out.**

Although it is more difficult to eat wisely in a restaurant, choosing unbreaded, non-fried, sensible sized portions can help you maintain your diet program. Asking for half portions (most restaurants don't advertise this but are prepared to serve them), or splitting an entrée works too.

### **Take only your medication, and take it as directed.**

If you are being treated by more than one physician, make sure each knows all of the medications you are taking.

### **Dream.**

Dreams tell us that there is a future to anticipate. Dreams are among the best reminders of our inner creativity. Write them down and/or draw them to open your eyes to your inner thoughts and desires, and help you tap into your creative potential.

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